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ABSTRACT

A survey of 123 students enrolled in Introduction to Social Psychology at the University of Wisconsin--Green Bay examined attitudes toward Native Americans. The research assessed the effects of educational programs at the secondary and postsecondary level on attitudes toward Native Americans and Native American treaty rights, and also measured the effects of positive contacts between American Indians and respondents on specific attitudes toward treaty rights. Results indicate that either high school or college coursework about Native Americans was related to greater self-reported understanding of treaty rights, knowledge of American Indian culture, and accuracy of that knowledge. Students with high school coursework also reported more direct contact with Native Americans than those without such coursework. Students with coursework about American Indians were less likely to view European culture as superior and less likely to feel that treaties should be abolished, indicating that high school or college coursework may reduce prejudicial attitudes toward Native Americans. Women reported higher quality contacts with Native Americans and were more likely to agree that a nearby Indian nation should win its treaty rights case. Neither high school nor college coursework had any influence on these variables. Only college coursework influenced feelings regarding specific treaty-rights issues: taxation of casino profits and removal of trust lands from property tax roles. A cautionary note points out that the direction of causality between coursework and attitudes and between contact and attitudes is unknown. (TD)

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Purpose. That prejudice and discrimination toward American Indians exists in American society cannot be denied. Various theories exist as to the roots of this prejudice. One possibility is that prejudice has its roots in stereotyping--false perceptions about what specific groups are like (Rouse & Hanson, 1991, Zanna, 1994).

Assuming that prejudice has its genesis in stereotyping, one would assume that fostering a correct knowledge base concerning a minority group would in itself reduce prejudice. Previous research has indicated educational programs can indeed reduce general prejudicial attitudes toward American Indians (Reeve, 1974; VanDerKeilen, 1977; Amado, 1982; Locke, 1992).

A second approach to combating ignorance concerning minority groups concerns bringing diverse peoples into contact with one another in non-competitive ways. In the best scenario, the groups should gather on equal footing, and perform a cooperative task (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1986). Research has in fact indicated that contact with members of a minority group may

foster positive attitudes toward the group (Brophy, 1946; Jahoda & West, 1951). However, a positive attitude prior to contact with the other ethnic group may be needed to gain a robust effect (Clément, Gardner, & Smythe, 1977).

The present research examined several of the previous assumptions. The effects of educational programs at the secondary and post-secondary level on attitudes toward Native Americans and Native American Treaty Rights were assessed. The present research also measured the effects of positive contacts with American Indians by members of the subject population, on specific attitudes toward treaty rights.

The present research was performed in northeastern Wisconsin. Two Indian Nations have reservations in the area--the Menominee and the Oneida. A third Nation, the Chippewa, also have reservations in fairly close proximity to the area. The Chippewa had recently won a lawsuit in which fishing rights guaranteed under a nineteenth century treaty were regained. The Menominee currently have a similar lawsuit in the courts regarding hunting, fishing, and logging rights. All three tribes operate successful casino operations.

It was predicted that as knowledge of Native American culture increased, support for treaty rights would increase, and prejudice would decrease. It was felt that positive contacts with American Indians would also decrease prejudice, while fostering support for treaty rights.

Methods. A survey was distributed to each student enrolled in Introduction to Social Psychology at the University of Wisconsin--Green Bay. A letter indicated attitudes toward Native Americans were being examined, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. Response rate was 68% (n = 123). The city of Green Bay is located adjacent to the Oneida reservation, and is an approximately one to two hour drive from the Menominee reservation.

Section one of the survey solicited demographic information, and whether the subject had courses including information about Native American culture in high school or college. In section two, subjects indicated what percentage of the general population they felt they exceeded in knowledge of American Indians, quality contact, and understanding of treaty rights.

In section three, subjects responded to eight ten-point scales (1 = disagree; 10 = agree). The first scale assessed

degree of quality of contacts with American Indians, and the second measured perceived accuracy of knowledge. Five scales measured attitudes toward treaty rights (e.g. that the nation suing the state should win its case, that casino profits should not be taxed, that property purchased and placed in federal trust be exempt from local property taxes). The remaining scales were designed to assess the degree of prejudice expressed by the subjects (whether they believed European culture superior to that of the Indians, and whether all treaties should be abolished).

Results. The average age of the subjects was 21.8 years (s.d. = 6.3). The subjects had earned an average of 39.7 college credits (s.d. = 26.7), and had a mean college GPA of 2.9 (s.d. = 0.51). Their average high school GPA was 3.2 (s.d. = 0.45). Twenty-nine percent of the subjects indicated they had "grown-up" in Green Bay area, fifty-six percent were from Wisconsin, with the remainder having been raised elsewhere. Only two subjects indicated they were members of a minority group.

Analyses of variance indicated few gender differences. On ten-point scales, women ($F_{1,91} = 7.6, p < .006$) reported their contacts with Native Americans to be of higher quality (mean = 6.9, s.d. = 2.5) than men (mean = 5.4, s.d. = 1.8). Women ($F_{1,111}$

= 5.0, $p < .02$) were also more likely to agree the Indian Nation suing for its treaty rights should win its case (mean = 5.0, s.d. = 2.6) than men (mean = 3.8, s.d. = 2.7). Neither high school nor college coursework had any influence on these variables.

Two main effects occurred regarding degree of understanding of treaty rights. Subjects who had taken high school coursework concerning Native Americans felt they exceeded a higher percentage of the population in their understanding (mean = 34.8%, s.d. = 24.5) than subjects who had not taken such coursework (mean = 25.1%, s.d. = 21.9) ($F_{1,109} = 4.9$, $p < .03$). Likewise, subjects having taken college courses containing information about Native Americans ($F_{1,109} = 7.4$, $p < .007$) felt they exceeded a higher percentage of the population in their understanding (mean = 37.3%, s.d. = 27.6) than those who had not (mean = 23.9%, s.d. = 18.9).

Two main effects also resulted on the measure of the percentage of the general public the subjects felt they exceeded in knowledge of American Indian culture. Subjects having had high school coursework ($F_{1,109} = 10.9$, $p < .001$) felt they exceeded 51.9% (s.d. = 23.3) of the population in knowledge, while those without high school coursework felt they exceeded

only 36.8% (s.d. = 24.3) of the population. Subjects having taken college courses ($F_{1,109} = 3.8, p < .05$) felt they had more knowledge than 49.9% (s.d. = 28.2) of the population, while those without college coursework reported a lesser understanding of treaty rights (mean = 38.4%, s.d. = 21.9).

The relationship of coursework and degree of knowledge was paralleled by the analysis of the ten-point scale of self-reported accuracy of knowledge. Subjects having had high school coursework ($F_{1,108} = 9.4, p < .003$) felt their knowledge to be more accurate (mean = 6.7, s.d. = 1.9) than those who had not (mean = 5.5, s.d. = 2.1). Likewise, students having had college coursework ($F_{1,108} = 6.2, p < .01$) felt their knowledge to be more accurate (mean = 6.7, s.d. = 2.2) than subjects without college coursework (mean = 5.5, s.d. = 2.0).

Having had high school coursework was related to the extent of direct contact with American Indians ($F_{1,109} = 8.9, p < .003$). Subjects having had high school courses felt they exceeded a greater percentage of the population in direct contact (mean = 42.5%, s.d. = 24.5) than those who had not (mean = 28.6%, s.d. = 23.6). No effect for college coursework occurred for this variable.

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On the measures assessing attitudes toward treaty rights, main effects were found for college coursework only. Analysis of variance ($F_{1,109} = 3.7, p < .05$) indicated students having had college coursework were more likely to agree on a 10 point scale that property purchased and placed in federal trust should be exempt from property taxes (mean = 4.3, s.d. = 3.1) than those not having college coursework (mean = 3.2, s.d. = 2.8). Likewise, students with college coursework ($F_{1,109} = 5.6, p < .01$) were less likely to agree casino profits should be taxed (mean = 6.4, s.d. = 3.1) than students who did not take such courses in college (mean = 7.7, s.d. = 2.4).

Students having had high-school coursework regarding Native Americans ($F_{1,109} = 4.0, p < .04$) were less likely to feel treaties should be abolished (mean = 3.3, s.d. = 2.5) than students who had not taken such courses. A marginal main effect ($F_{1,109} = 2.9, p < .08$) occurred for college coursework on this variable. College students with coursework were also less likely to agree to abolition of treaties (mean = 3.2, s.d. = 2.4) than those without coursework (mean = 4.3, s.d. = 2.5).

On the general attitude measures, high school students with coursework about American Indians ($F_{1,107} = 7.6, p < .006$) were

less likely to indicate on a 10 point scale that the conquest of North American indicated European superiority (mean = 2.7, s.d. = 2.1) than those without such coursework (mean = 4.1, s.d. = 2.8). In a similar fashion, college students ($F_{1,107} = 4.6, p < .03$) were also less likely to view European culture superior (mean = 2.7, s.d. = 2.4) when having had coursework involving Native American culture, than those who had not (mean = 4.0, s.d. = 2.5).

Conclusions. The results of the present study indicate support for one hypothesis, and partial support for a second. Specifically, the present research indicates that either high school or college coursework may increase self-reported understanding of treaty rights, knowledge of American Indian culture, and accuracy of that knowledge. Students with high school coursework also reported more direct contact with Native Americans than those without such coursework. While no differences in contact were indicated when college courses were involved, this may simply be due to the fact the students had a longer time to make contact since high school.

High school or college coursework may also reduce prejudicial attitudes toward Native Americans. This is seen in

the results that students with coursework about American Indians are less likely to view European culture as superior (thus disagreeing with a clearly ethnocentric view), and are less likely to feel treaties with Indian Nations should be abolished. This is in keeping with one of the hypotheses of the present study, based on earlier research (Reeve, 1974; VanDerkeilen, 1977; Amado, 1982; Locke, 1992) that education may reduce prejudice.

An interesting finding is that only college coursework influenced feelings regarding specific treaty-rights issues--taxation of casino profits, and removal of trust lands from property tax roles, partially supporting a second hypothesis of the present study. Future research should examine whether this is due to differences in high school and college curricular content. Future research should also study the relationship between actual amount of coursework/curricular content concerning American Indians and attitudes more directly, since the lack of significant statistical interactions seems to show a non-additive effect of such education. Further research regarding the interaction of Euro-American men and women with Native Americans is also needed, to determine why gender differences in quality of

interaction and general attitude toward the lawsuit over treaty rights occurred.

One cautionary note must also be made. It is not known whether the subjects' contacts with American Indians precedes or follows the formation of particular attitudes. It is possible that those subjects likely to seek contact may be less prejudiced *a priori*. The same may be true regarding coursework--less prejudiced students may be more likely to sign-up for courses surveying American Indian culture. Future research should assess frequency of contact, and the intention to make future contacts. Ideally, such research should be longitudinal in nature, assessing attitudes as subjects move through the schools, encountering curriculum involving American Indians.

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